

Congressman DeFazio firmly believes that it is an obligation of the federal government, not an option, to properly take care of the men and women who proudly serve in our nation's armed forces. Throughout his time in Congress he has fought to ensure that the United States makes good on that obligation. In recent years Congress has passed long overdue funding increases for the VA, and DeFazio has always insisted that these funds translate into better service for Oregon Veterans.

These men and women proudly fought for their country. They should not have to have to battle bureaucrats at the VA here at home just to get the services that they have earned. Congressman DeFazio has consistently gone head to head with the VA and supported legislation to make sure that all veterans are able to access the services to which they are entitled without any hassle.

In the 111th Congress (2009-2010)

Ø In April 2010, DeFazio introduced H.R. 5185, the Fair Care for Military Families Act, which would allow children to remain on their parents' TRICARE or CHAMPVA health insurance plan until age 26. Health care reform allows children to remain on their parents' civilian insurance plan until age 26. H.R. 5185 simply offers that same benefit to families covered by CHAMPVA or TRICARE. Provisions to extend TRICARE and CHAMPVA coverage until age 26 were ultimately included in the 2011 Department of Defense Authorization Act, which passed in the House with Congressman DeFazio's support.

Ø In November 2009, DeFazio introduced H. Res. 925, a bipartisan resolution to honor military

aviators who were forced down in hostile territory and subsequently managed to evade or escape enemy capture. These aviators, many of them serving in WWII, have never received formal recognition from the Armed Services for their meritorious service in avoiding capture or in escaping from captivity. The bipartisan H. Res. 925 expresses congressional recognition for these airmen's accomplishments. It also directs the Secretaries of the military departments to consider such aviators for appropriate recognition within their branch of the Armed Forces.

Ø In July 2009, DeFazio introduced the Troops' Soft Landing, Employment, and Rural Transportation Act. This bill provides for a **soft landing for National Guard and Reserve troops by e**nsuring that returning service members have a firm safety net when they return from war. By allowing them to remain on active duty for up to 90 days, collect pay, and access reintegration services, this legislation will help ease the adjustment from combat to civilian life. Currently Guard and Reserve troops have only a few days to readjust before returning to civilian life. The bill also provides counseling for the troops for those 90 days. The bill also expands the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for veterans to provide a better tax credit for businesses who hire veterans from high unemployment areas like the 4th Congressional district. Finally, the bill authorizes the VA to establish a grant program to provide transportation to veterans in highly rural areas. In rural communities across the nation, veterans rely on the generosity of family and veterans service organizations to transport them to VA facilities for appointments, exams, treatments, and testing services.

Ø In June 2009, DeFazio introduced H.R. 2673, the Equal Treatment for Widows of Wartime Veterans Act, which corrects a discrepancy in the pension benefits paid to windows of wartime veterans. The bill will simply make the base surviving spouse benefit equal to the wartime vet benefit.

DeFazio voted for several bills to improve Veterans access to benefits:

Ø H.R. 1016- Veterans Health Care Budget Reform & Transparency Act (*Signed into Law 10/22/2009*) , a top priority of veterans' groups, authorizing Congress to approve VA medical care appropriations one year in advance to ensure reliable and timely funding and prevent politics from ever delaying VA health care funding. The annual struggle to pass the VA budget in a timely manner severely reduces the VA's ability to provide quality care to veterans and hampers the VA's ability to recruit well-trained medical professionals, maintain operational facilities, and acquire new equipment. Ultimately, our nation's veterans pay the price in poor services. The VA needs an assured and advance source of funding to meet the growing demand for care and services. H.R. 1016 will help to provide that assurance.

Ø S.1963- Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services (*Signed into Law 5/5/2010*), landmark legislation providing help to caregivers of disabled, ill or injured veterans, and improving VA health services for women veterans. The bill also expands mental health services available through the VA, helping to ensure that veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are able to receive timely and proper mental health and PTSD care. Establishes rural mental health centers and other programs to serve rural veterans.

Ø H.R. 4899- agent orange BENEFITS (*Signed into Law 7/29/2010*), providing long overdue disability benefits to more than 150,000 Vietnam veterans and survivors for exposure to Agent Orange. The VA planned to recognize ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease, and B-cell leukemia as being linked to Agent Orange exposure, and H.R. 4899 finally provides the funding for disability benefits for Agent Orange vets with these ailments.

DeFazio cosponsored:

Ø H.R. 23, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2009

Ø H. Res. 111, Establishing a Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs

Ø H.R. 333, the Disable Veterans Tax Termination Act, would finally provide an overarching solution to the issue of concurrent receipt. The bill corrects several inequities by allowing veterans with a service-connected disability of less than 50% to claim both retired pay and disability compensation. It also extends Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay to disability retirees with less than 20 years of creditable service.

Ø H.R. 613, the Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act – legislation to forgive any overpayment of military retired pay for the month following the death of the veteran, allowing the surviving spouse to keep the full months benefit so they can mourn without less concern about paying bills.

Ø [H.R. 775](#) , the Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act - would repeal current law that stipulates a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) for each dollar of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) a surviving spouse receives.

Ø H.R. 816, the Military Retirees Health Care Protection Act, legislation that prohibits the Pentagon from unilaterally increasing the out-of-pocket costs for military retirees seeking health care.

Ø [H.R. 2389](#) , the Health Care for Members of the Armed Forces Exposed to Chemical

Hazards Act of 2009, provides that soldiers exposed to chemical hazards be offered a complete medical check-up.

In the 110th Congress (2007- 2008)

Ø In June 2008, DeFazio cosponsored the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007, which was incorporated into H.R. 2642, the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008, and was signed into law. The Post 9/11 bill is the greatest overhaul of the G.I. Bill in over 20 years, covering the cost of a college education at a public university for qualifying veterans. Additionally, the legislation provides benefits to Reserve and National Guard members reflecting the length and service of these citizen soldiers. It also provides soliders and veterans with the option of transferring education benefits to their spouses and children.

Ø In August, 2008, DeFazio voted in favor of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 which prohibits foreclosure for nine months after military service and provides a much needed increase to the VA home loan limit. DeFazio supported the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 that revamped the VA home loan program by enabling more veterans to refinance their existing high-risk loans with VA loans and he voted to expand homeownership opportunities by making thousands of veterans eligible for low-interest loans.

Ø DeFazio voted to increase the budget for veterans' health care and service by \$16.3 billion dollars during the 110th Congress. The increases supported by Congressman DeFazio in the last two years are more than increases in Congress over the preceding 12 years.

Ø DeFazio voted in address veteran health care treatment and access. DeFazio helped pass the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act to address the troubling increase of suicide in our veteran community. The bill offers comprehensive services to veterans and sets up a 24-hour toll-free suicide hotline. The hotline has already served more than 30,000 veterans, family members, and friends.

Ø DeFazio supported provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2008 to provide an additional three years of VA health care eligibility for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (for a total of vie years) and improves and expands the VA's ability to care for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury. DeFazio voted in favor of expansions to mental health services, increases to research through the national Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He voted to mandate a program to help rural veterans get the health care they need closer to home.

Ø DeFazio voted to provide essential reforms to bring the VA claims processing system up-to-date for more accurate and timely delivery of benefits to veterans, families, and survivors.

Ø On June 15, 2007, DeFazio voted in favor of H.R. 2642, the fiscal year 2008 spending bill for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This legislation provides the largest increase in funding for veterans' health care in the VA's 77-year history. Importantly, unlike the President's budget, which proposed doubling the prescription drug co-payment for veterans and imposing an annual enrollment fee of up to \$750, this increased funding will not shift costs for services onto the backs of veterans. H.R. 2642 includes \$43.2 billion for the VA, \$3.8 billion above the President's request and \$6.7 billion above the 2007 level. This funding will improve the delivery of health care services to veterans, add over 1,000 new claims processors to reduce the backlog of 400,000 disability claims, and fund new initiatives to better address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health needs, polytraumas, and substance abuse among veterans. Important initiatives include:

\$28.9 billion for veterans' medical services, \$1.7 billion above the President's request and \$3.4 billion above the 2007 level;

\$600 million to establish five Level I Polytrauma Centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and PTSD to improve the delivery of health care services to veterans, particularly those with multiple injuries and mental health problems;

\$2.9 billion for specialty mental health care, equal to the President's request and \$100 million over the 2007 level;

\$4.1 billion for VA medical facilities, \$508 million above the President's request and \$530 million above the 2007 level to address ongoing maintenance and renovation needs (the Department estimates a maintenance backlog of over \$5 billion);

\$480 million for VA medical and prosthetic research, \$69 million above the President's request and \$66 million above the 2007 level;

\$429 million for the VA substance abuse program, \$70 million above the President's request and \$72 million above the 2007 amount;

\$130 million to assist homeless veterans, \$23 million above the President's request and \$38 million over the 2007 level;

Ø On Marcy 15, 2007, DeFazio voted in favor of H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act. This legislation was drafted in response to the deplorable conditions uncovered at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. H.R. 1538 will:

Improve access to quality medical care for wounded service members who are outpatients at military health care facilities;

Begin the process of restoring the integrity and efficiency of the disability evaluation system and taking other steps to cut bureaucratic red tape;

Improve the transition of wounded service members from the Armed Forces to the VA system;

Create a new system of case managers, advocates and counselors for wounded service members to monitor progress, track cases and ensure proper care;

Establish a toll-free hotline for service personnel and family members to report problems with care of facilities;

Include an amendment introduced by Rep. Darlene Hooley that ensures wounded members of the National Guard and Reserves can receive medical care at the military treatment facility closest to their home rather than the base they deployed from, which can be thousands of miles from home;

Improve mental health care services; and

Increase the reimbursement for veterans who have to travel to receive medical care.

Ø On May 23, 2007, DeFazio supported a variety of bills to assist veterans, including:

H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act, legislation to establish a grant program for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide money to states for outreach activities to veterans and their families about benefits and programs for which they are eligible and to help veterans apply for such benefits and programs.

H.R. 2199, the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Health Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act, legislation to establish new research centers for TBI across the country, a screening program for veterans for TBI, a comprehensive program of long-term care for TBI rehabilitation, a TBI Veterans Health Registry, and a pilot program of mobile VA centers to improve access to veterans' readjustment benefits and mental health services in rural areas. These mobile centers would also help veterans file disability claims.

H.R. 612, the Returning Servicemember VA Health Care Insurance Act, legislation to extend from two years to five years following discharge for a veteran who served in combat during or after the Persian Gulf War to access care through the VA. It also provides three additional years of eligibility for veterans discharged more than five years before the enactment of this bill and who had not been previously enrolled in the VA. This legislation is necessary to allow those with injuries, such as post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, which might not be readily apparent until years after discharge, from getting treatment for these injuries through the VA.

H.R. 1470, legislation to expand chiropractic care to all veterans' medical centers over the next four years.

H.R. 2239, the Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits, legislation to extend eligibility for Voc Rehab benefits to current members of the Armed Forces who are hospitalized or are receiving outpatient medical care and have a disability that is likely to result in discharge. Currently, veterans are not eligible for such services until they have actually been discharged.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 2247, the Montgomery G.I. Bill for Life. This legislation will repeal the 10 year limit on the use of education benefits under the G.I. Bill, thus allowing veterans to use the benefits at any time during their lifetime.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 1211, legislation to allow members of the National Guard and Reserve to be eligible for the MGIB after 24 months of cumulative active duty service. Under current law, eligibility requires 24 months of "continuous" active duty service.

Ø As he has during several prior sessions of Congress, DeFazio is again a cosponsor of several high priority bills for the veterans and military retiree communities:

H.R. 333: legislation to fully repeal the disabled veteran's tax for all veterans

H.R. 303: legislation to provide concurrent receipt to military retirees, with 20 or more years of service, who are rated less than 50 percent disabled; eliminate the 10-year phase-in for retirees rated less than 100 percent; allow individuals who were forced into retirement under the Temporary Early Retirement Authority to apply for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC).

H.R. 89: legislation that authorizes monthly combat-related special compensation pay to any military retiree who is entitled to retired pay and has a combat-related disability. (Currently, a retiree must meet those requirements and also have completed at least 20 years of retirement-creditable military service.)

H.R. 1222: legislation to open up the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) to military retirees. DeFazio believes military retirees deserve the same health care benefits available to Members of Congress. This legislation would provide that security. Opening up the FEHBP is important since many Oregonians have trouble finding a provider who will accept TRICARE because of low reimbursement rates and burdensome regulations.

H.R. 579: legislation to prohibit the Pentagon from unilaterally increasing the out-of-pocket costs for military retirees seeking health care. The President has repeatedly proposed to increase co-payments and establish a new annual fee for certain military retirees to participate in TRICARE.

H.R. 2514: legislation to make veterans health care spending a mandatory part of the federal budget, with automatic increases tied to the number of veterans eligible for care.

H.R. 1927: legislation to eliminate the existing Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset to the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and the current 30-year paid-up SBP coverage implementation date from October 1, 2008 to October 1, 2007.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 463, legislation to overturn a Bush administration decision to prohibit Priority 8 veterans from enrolling in the VA health care system. Priority 8 veterans are those with non-service connected conditions and income above a certain threshold (roughly \$45,000 for a family of four in Oregon, or \$30,000 for a veteran plus one).

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 690, legislation to lower the retirement age for members of the National Guard and Reserve from 60 to 55.

In the 109th Congress (2005-2006)

Ø DeFazio continued his long-standing fight for adequate funding for veterans programs. In

February 2005, President Bush submitted a budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that fell \$2.6 billion below the level national veterans organizations said was necessary. Further, the President=s budget would have required veterans to pay more out-of-pocket for care and eliminated eligibility for some veterans all together. In response, DeFazio joined colleagues in writing to Speaker Hastert in March 2005 urging that the House drafted budget reject the President=s inadequate funding level. And, when the House considered H.R. 2528 on May 26, 2005, DeFazio supported an amendment by Rep. Obey (D-WI) to reduce the tax cut for millionaires in 2006 from \$140,000 to \$129,000 in order to add \$2.6 billion to the VA budget. The amendment DeFazio supported would have provided \$1.5 billion more for veterans medical care; \$300 million to improve VA medical facilities; \$67 million more for veterans medical research, including prosthetics research; \$201 million more for medical clinics and long-term care facilities; and \$537 million more for administrative functions to speed the processing of veterans claims. This amendment was defeated on a procedural motion.

Ø In June 2005, the Bush administration finally admitted that the VA faced a financial shortfall of at least \$1 billion in 2005 and \$2.6 billion in 2006, just as DeFazio and others argued months earlier. DeFazio joined dozens of colleagues in writing to President Bush in late June 2005 urging him to submit a supplemental appropriations request for the VA to Congress. An additional \$1.2 billion for veterans health care in 2005 was added to H.R. 2528, and funding for 2006 was increased by \$2.6 billion in H.R. 2528. The bill also rejected the President=s proposal to increase out-of-pocket costs and rejected his proposal to prohibit Category 8 veterans from using VA health care facilities. H.R. 2528, which DeFazio voted in favor of, was signed into law on November 30, 2005.

Ø For fiscal year 2007, the president's budget again fell far short - \$1.2 billion - of the level veterans' organizations say is necessary for VA health care. His budget also under-funds medical and prosthetics research, VA construction programs, and claims processing. The president also once again proposed a \$250 annual enrollment fee for some veterans, and proposed to double the prescription drug co-payment as well from \$8 to \$15 for a 30-day supply. In total, the president proposed to shift \$2.6 billion over 5 years onto veterans and their families. The fee increases are expected to force nearly 200,000 veterans out of the VA system. DeFazio voted in favor of H.R. 5385, the legislation to fund the VA for 2007. H.R. 5385 blocked the fee increases proposed by the president. It also increased funding for health care by 12 percent. And, DeFazio supported an amendment to boost the funding levels for veterans

in H.R. 5385 by an additional \$1.8 billion. These increases would be funded by reducing the tax cut for millionaires in 2007 by \$5,000, leaving them with a more than generous tax cut of \$109,000. Regrettably, Republican leaders defeated this common-sense amendment.

Ø To permanently address these persistent funding shortfalls, DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 515, the Assured Funding For Veterans Health Care Act. H.R. 515 would end the annual ramping up or down of this vital funding by making veterans health care spending a mandatory part of the federal budget with increases automatically provided based on the number of veterans eligible for care.

Ø In response to the theft of a VA laptop that contained personal information on 26 million veterans, DeFazio cosponsored H.R. 5455, the Veterans Identity Protection Act, would provide three years of credit protection, with one year of free credit monitoring followed by free credit reports once a year for two years. DeFazio also cosponsor of H.R. 5588, the Comprehensive Veterans' Data Protection and Identity Theft Prevention Act. Besides the credit monitoring and credit report protections offered in H.R. 5455, this legislation requires notification to victims in the event of a data breach, allows veterans to freeze their credit for at least one year to limit the ability of anyone to open new lines of credit, and allows veterans to place a fraud alert in their credit record to notify credit agencies that the individual has personal information that has been compromised and could be subject to identity theft.

Ø DeFazio took the lead on the House side in fighting a VA proposal to investigate 70,000+ veterans who are rated 100% disabled due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The VA review could have resulted in benefit cuts for thousands of veterans. DeFazio drafted a letter dated October 14, 2005, signed by 50 of his colleagues to the Chairman and Ranking Members of the VA subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee urging the Committee to adopt a Senate provision to block the VA investigation. In response to pressure from Congress and

veterans, the VA announced in November 2005 that its review would be canceled.

Ø In his budget, the president also proposed to double TRICARE premiums for senior enlisted retirees and triple them for officer retirees by 2009. Drug co-payments would also increase. The president's plan would shift \$2.4 billion onto retirees. The fee increases of more than \$1,000 could drive more than 144,000 retirees out of TRICARE. DeFazio cosponsored bipartisan legislation, H.R. 4949, to block the Pentagon's proposal. DeFazio also voted in favor of H.R. 5122, the fiscal year 2007 Department of Defense Authorization Act, which contained provisions to block the fee increases. The final version of H.R. 5122 was approved by the House on September 29, 2006 and the Senate the following day.

Ø DeFazio has been a long-time proponent of repealing the Adisabled veterans tax,@ which is the prohibition in current law for some veterans to receive both their full disability and their full retirement pay. Although Congress has approved some changes over the last couple of years to reduce the number of veterans impacted by this tax, DeFazio supports legislation to repeal the disabled veterans tax immediately for all veterans. DeFazio is a cosponsor of:

H.R. 303, legislation to provide concurrent receipt of disability and retirement pay to military retirees with 20 or more years of service who are rated less than 50% disabled; eliminate the 10-year phase in for retirees rate less than 100%; and allow individuals who were forced into early retirement under the Temporary Early Retirement Authority to apply for Combat-Related Special Compensation;

H.R. 2076, legislation to provide full concurrent receipt to disabled retirees with a disability rating of less than 100%, but with what the VA terms AIndividual Unemployability@ rating of 100%; and,

H.R. 1366, legislation to expand CRSC to combat-disabled military retirees who were retired on disability before reaching 20 years of service.

Ø When House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Steve Buyer (R-IN) unilaterally announced his plan to cancel the annual joint House-Senate hearing at which veterans organizations like the American Legion and VFW testified on VA budget issues, DeFazio joined dozens of colleagues in writing to Speaker Hastert on November 14, 2005, urging him to reinstate the annual hearing.

Ø DeFazio is again a cosponsor of H.R. 602, the Keep Our Promise to Military Retirees Act. This legislation would provide military retirees with access to the same health care system available to Members of Congress.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 968, legislation to move up the current 30-year paid-up Survivors Benefit Plan (SBP) coverage implementation date from October 1, 2008, to October 1, 2005. While this legislation was incorporated into the Senate version of H.R. 1815, the fiscal year 2006 Department of Defense Authorization Act. The Republican leadership in Congress

removed it from the final version of the bill.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 808, to repeal the unfair offset and allow a surviving military spouse to receive full benefits under both the SBP and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

Ø DeFazio joined dozens of colleagues in writing to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter on May 17, 2005, in support of including the provisions from H.R. 808, H.R. 968, and H.R. 303 in the final version of H.R. 1815, the DOD Authorization bill. Unfortunately, none of these bills were included.

Ø Under current law, state veterans mortgage programs, such as the one in Oregon, can only issue tax-exempt bonds to veterans who served before 1976. DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 2952, a bipartisan bill to eliminate this arbitrary cutoff and allow veterans of more recent conflicts to be eligible for homeowners assistance.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 4025, the Disabled Veterans Fairness Act, which would increase the mileage reimbursement disabled veterans can receive when traveling to VA facilities for care from 11 cents per mile to 48.5 cents, the same reimbursement level federal employees receive.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 1188, legislation to provide disabled veterans with access to space-available travel on military airplanes and access to military commissaries.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 1352, the Veterans Employment and Respect Act, which would extend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit to employers who hire veterans and/or their dependents.

Ø DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 2060, legislation that exempts members of the National Guard and Reserve who are called to active duty for more than 60 days from the recently enacted punitive reforms to bankruptcy laws.

In the 108th Congress (2003-2004):

Ø DeFazio has been a vocal supporter of increased funding for veterans programs. He voted

against the House Republican budget, which largely mirrored the budget submitted by President Bush, because of inadequate funding for veterans.

The budget proposed by President Bush in February did not adequately provide for veterans needs. It included only a 1.8% increase in veterans medical spending. That increase barely keeps pace with inflation and current services. The funding level would certainly not allow for improved services or adequate care for an increasing number of veterans, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush also proposed to double the prescription drug co-payment to \$15 and impose a \$250 annual enrollment fee on Category 7 and 8 veterans. The VFW Commander-in-Chief issued a scathing press release in opposition to the President's budget. He called the budget "a disgrace and a sham," and said, "it is further evident that veterans are no longer a priority with this administration."

The House Republicans did not significantly improve on the President's inadequate budget for veterans when drafting their own budget resolution. The Republican budget provided \$1.3 billion less for veterans programs in 2005 than what the House Committee on Veterans Affairs recommended on a bipartisan basis. It provided \$2 billion less for veterans programs than what veterans themselves requested in their Independent Budget proposal, which is why DeFazio voted against it. Veterans' organizations, including Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America have called the Republican budget "half-hearted" and "ill-advised". They urged a vote against it and said the Republican budget "would be a disservice to those men and women who have served this country and who are currently serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world in our fight against terrorism."

Ø In June 2004, DeFazio voted in favor of a budget amendment by Representative David Obey (D-WI), H.Res. 685. The Obey amendment would have added \$1.3 billion for veterans' health

care. The amendment was defeated 184-230.

Ø As he has in previous Congresses, DeFazio actively supported one of the top priorities of veterans activists: repealing the VA disability compensation offset. Despite the fact that a veteran may earn both military retired pay and VA disability compensation, current law requires that military retired pay be reduced by the amount of any disability compensation received. DeFazio cosponsored legislation, H.R. 303, to repeal this offset. He also signed a discharge petition that would force the House Republican leadership to schedule a vote on the bill. A discharge petition needs 218 signatures to force a vote. This discharge petition currently has 204 signatures.

Ø DeFazio has long fought for increased funding for veterans health care. To permanently address these persistent funding shortfalls, DeFazio is a cosponsor of H.R. 2318, the Assured Funding For Veterans Health Care Act. H.R. 2318 would end the annual ramping up or down of this vital funding by making veterans health care spending a mandatory part of the federal budget with increases automatically provided based on the number of veterans eligible for care.

Ø DeFazio continued to be an advocate for improving benefits to the survivors of deceased military retirees. Under current law, when a widow or widower who is receiving money under the Survivor's Benefit Plan turns 62, a Social Security offset reduces benefits from 55 percent to 35 percent of the spouse's military retiree pay. DeFazio is a cosponsor of two bills (H.R. 548 and H.R. 3763, which phases in repeal of the offset more slowly to keep the cost down) to increase the SBP to 55 percent of retired pay. DeFazio has also signed the discharge petition to force a vote on the House floor on H.R. 548. Thankfully, improvements to the SBP were included in the House version of the FY05 DOD Authorization Act (H.R. 4200). DeFazio voted in favor of the bill. H.R. 4200 phases in an increase in the SBP back to 55 percent over the next four years.

Ø DeFazio was a leading advocate for protecting VA facilities in the Northwest from closure. The Bush Administration created the Capital Assets Realignment for Enhanced Services Commission (CARES Commission). Early drafts of the CARES report indicated that at least three VA facilities in the Northwest, including the White City domiciliary, could be targeted for closure. DeFazio wrote to VA Secretary Principi and the CARES Commission in opposition to the closure of facilities in the Northwest. DeFazio also cosponsored legislation, H.R. 2808 that would give Congress the right to veto decisions by the CARES Commission and the VA Secretary to close facilities. The CARES Commission ultimately agreed and did not recommend closing these facilities.

Ø As he has in past Congresses, DeFazio also cosponsored legislation that was the top priority of military retirees, H.R. 3474, the Keep Our Promises to Military Retirees. This legislation would allow military retirees to qualify for the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan, which is the same health care available to Members of Congress.